



Researcher proposes five-step framework for integrating displaced populations into the labour markets

Journal:	<i>Human Resource Management International Digest</i>
Manuscript ID	HRMID-06-2020-0149
Manuscript Type:	Viewpoint
Keywords:	Entrepreneurs, Labour mobility, Ethnic groups, Labour market, Migrant workers

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

A research paper has used the example of Syrian refugees in Turkey to explore the best ways to overcome the many barriers to integrating displaced populations into labour markets. He proposed an original framework for integrating displaced populations into labour markets using the acronym CLEAR - certainty of status, language training, education opportunities, aid as an investment and the right to work.

Isik Oguzertem wrote the paper, entitled: "What are the barriers to integrating displaced populations into labor markets and what are possible steps to overcome them?" for Building Markets, in New York. His research drew on government statistics, published reports and independent research he carried out in Turkey from 2016 to 2018.

The Syrian crisis prompted one of the biggest exoduses of modern history, and since 2014 governments and aid agencies have been asking for US\$4 billion a year to respond to the regional impact. International awareness of the seriousness of the problem grew following the publication of the image of the drowned Syrian child Alan Kurdi who was washed ashore in 2015. It highlighted the dangers faced by families fleeing Syria in their desperate desire to find a better life.

But effective solutions to integrating the refugees into new countries have been hard to find. Turkey is a fascinating and instructive example. It hosts the world's highest number of refugees and displaced persons and integrating nearly four million additional residents has proved difficult. Such a large number of refugees will inevitably place strains on infrastructure and the labour market. In addition Syrians refugees came to Turkey's border towns, which have high rates of unemployment.

But the Turkish Government did not have any plans in place to deal with the massive influx. They expected it to last a few months. At first Syrians were welcomed as misafirler ("guests"), a status that assumed they would not stay. In 2014, they were granted geçici koruma ("temporary protection"), which provided some status, but had the effect of codifying a lack of permanence. It provided some access to healthcare, but spoke little about long-term residency, or more complex life situations. And there were constant changes of rules around the labour market and work permits.

In 2017, the Turkish government took further steps. They introduced the cash-based Emergency Social Safety Net, which was available for one million Syrians in Turkey. The money came in the form of a monthly card top-up. But some of the restrictions proved problematic. Syrians earning more than a certain amount were disqualified from receiving it. This proved to be a disincentive to find work.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Syrians trying to find work were shoe-horned into existing Turkish labour relations. They had to be in possession of a work permit and no business was allowed to have a workforce with more than 10 per cent foreigners. Even when paid, there were challenges opening bank accounts and face restrictions on sending and receiving money internationally. There has also been social and political resistance to employing Syrians in areas of high unemployment.

The author argued that not enough has been done to build opportunities for the Syrian communities. He says they are often entrepreneurial and cosmopolitan in spirit. Syrians have established more than 7,000 micro and SME businesses in Turkey, ranging from shoe manufacturers to real estate agents. The author believes they have a unique ability to introduce new services and products to the Arab-speaking market.

Nearly a decade on from the first arrivals, there is still no cohesive, government-led strategy. In the absence of clear policy decisions, the public has developed its own narrative of suspicion towards the foreigners. A similar pattern is seen in other countries where there is an absence of well-developed strategy.

In Turkey, there have been a lot of missed opportunities. For example, when qualified refugee doctors spend too long waiting for accreditation of their licence, they opt for third-country resettlement. In 2018, it emerged that US\$30 billion had been spent on the relief response, but only 50,000 Syrians had received work permits. Also, in 2018, a study showed that efforts to increase school enrollment had not taken into account children's understanding of the classroom language. The net result was that not enough has been done to build a workforce that could contribute both to the prosperity of the Syrian communities, but also Turkey as a whole.

Therefore, the author proposed five measures that would dramatically improve the life chances of refugees. His plan was based on first-hand experience of programmes, donors and countries. The five measures are providing certainty of status; language skills; education opportunities; aid as an investment; and the right to work; or CLEAR.

One – “Certainty of status” encourages investment and helps families to make long-term plans. It will make them far more likely to invest in their futures and become economically productive. Working adults are also more likely to enroll their children in schools than factories.

Two – “Language skills” are vital. A focused effort to deliver adult language education will accelerate social integration and prevent marginalization. Knowing the host language also creates business opportunities and a deeper understanding of legal obligations.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Three – “Education opportunities” means equipping displaced populations with the tools to succeed. The first refugee graduates will be the ones building bridges across communities.

Four – “Aid as an investment” is about providing a safety net for the most vulnerable that allows them to take risks and survive shocks. It can be linked to school attendance, good performance on apprenticeship schemes.

Five – “The right to work” is important because restricting legal work forces it underground, cheapens it, and increases vulnerability. This is the opposite of building resilience in a population.